CHAPLIN

ON

RELIGIOUS DECLENSION.

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CAUSES

OF

RELIGIOUS DECLENSION;

PARTICULARLY THOSE WHICH HAVE OCCASIONED

THE

PRESENT LOW STATE OF RELIGION

AMONG DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS

OF

CHRISTIANS.

BY JEREMIAH CHAPLIN, D. D.
Pastor of the Baptist Church in Willington, Con.

HARTFORD:
CANFIELD AND ROBINS.
1837.

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In compliance with the earnest desire of several individuals, also of the Board of the Connecticut Baptist Convention, as expressed in the annexed resolution, the undersigned take pleasure in stating that the Rev. Dr. Chaplin has consented to present to the Christian public, in the form in which it now appears, his essay, originally prepared for an annual address of the Board to our churches in this state. It being adapted to the condition of churches of every denomination—embracing no denominational peculiarity—it was thought that it would be acceptable to professors of religion generally. May the Lord bless this effort of his servant to all Christians, and cause him to feel that his labor has not been in vain.

In behalf of the Board of the Connecticut Baptist Convention,

HENRY JACKSON,
GURDON ROBINS,

Hartford, May 13th, 1837. *Committee.*

The Board of the Connecticut Baptist Convention, at their Quarterly Meeting, held in Hartford on Tuesday, December 13th, 1836, having heard an essay, prepared by Rev. J. Chaplin, D. D., on the present low state of religion in the churches, passed the following Resolution:

Resolved, That the Rev. Dr. Chaplin be requested to publish his Essay in the form of a volume, and that the Rev. Henry Jackson and Rev. Gurdon Robins be associated with him to make arrangements for its publication.

Attest, ORSAMUS ALLEN, *Sec'y.*

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INTRODUCTION.

The low state of religion among Christians considered, and the importance of ascertaining the causes of the evil. Primary cause, the depravity of the human heart. Other causes stated and illustrated in the following chapters.

That religion is, at present, in a low state, will, it is believed, be generally admitted. There is, indeed, a vast deal said, especially on great public occasions, in relation to the interests of Christ's kingdom in the world. An abundance of warmth and zeal is frequently manifested on these occasions; and very touching things are uttered by many of the watchmen on Zion's walls, and by such of our lay brethren as come forward to advocate her cause. A kind of bustling activity is exhibited throughout the ranks of "the sacramental host of God's elect." The noble design in which the church has recently embarked—that of extending the empire of her King and Saviour through the world—has attracted the attention of multitudes, and has elicited from great numbers, not only expressions of approbation and applause, but very liberal subscriptions. The imposing grandeur of the enterprise has contributed much to its popularity; more has,

accordingly, been done for its promotion than the most sanguine of its friends presumed to anticipate. But amidst all this stir and bustle, there seems to be but little of the vitality and power of religion —but little of that deep, sober, unostentatious piety which once characterized the Christian community. And in those who are destitute of the grace of God, there is, generally speaking, scarce any appearance of anxiety to flee from the wrath to come, and lay hold on eternal life. The riches, honors, and pleasures of the world, most evidently engross their time and thoughts. Many of them take no pains to obtain that religious instruction which is God's appointed means of saving souls; while those who visit our worshipping assemblies, and pay a respectful attention to the public offices of religion, appear to receive no salutary impressions; they seem as easy in their sins, and as much devoted to worldly pursuits as they would naturally be did they know that the gospel was a cunningly devised fable, and that its whole system of doctrines, promises and duties, was founded in falsehood or delusion.

At such a time the friends of God should be alarmed, and labor to ascertain the cause of the declension which so extensively prevails. Such an effort is, undoubtedly, the first step towards effecting a removal of the existing evil. Till the *cause* be ascer-

tained, no remedy can be applied with any certainty of success. And when the cause is ascertained, the proper remedy will soon be discovered.

It will, undoubtedly, be admitted by orthodox Christians of every name, that the *depravity of the human heart* lies at the foundation of the evil in question. This depravity involves a constant tendency towards the world—a tendency which, unless counteracted, will effectually prevent each individual in whom it exists from exercising those holy affections which the word of God requires. And as its influence is great, so it is universal. It is not, indeed, equally powerful in all the individuals of our race. In unconverted men it is supreme. In them it has little, if any thing to contend with, except the power of natural conscience, occasionally excited by the common influences of the Spirit of God, and those social principles which exist in the breast of every human being, however depraved; and which, except in cases where depravity is fearfully aggravated by long custom in sin, exert some influence in opposition to the unholy dispositions of the heart. In persons renewed by the grace of God, this depravity has to contend, not only with conscience and the social affections, but with the principle of holiness implanted in the breast of every real Christian by the Divine Spirit. This principle is the proper and direct antagonist of moral depravity,

and exerts at times a powerful and most salutary influence in favor of God and holiness. But it too often resembles a tender plant growing in an unpropitious soil—a soil full of the seeds of useless and noxious herbs, which require the unremitting attention of the cultivator to check their progress. The heart even of the pious man, is sadly depraved; and this depravity is the grand, primary cause of that decline in religion which we have so much reason to lament. But this is a cause which always exists; when religion maintains its most elevated stand, as well as when it is in its lowest state. There are certain *other* things which exist and operate at particular times, and which give to the depravity of the heart that powerful, predominating influence, which it occasionally exerts. To some of these the attention of the Christian reader will be directed in the following chapters.

CAUSES

OF

RELIGIOUS DECLENSION.

CHAPTER I.

Neglect of the Bread of Life.

Men in their unrenewed state are dead in trespasses and sins; and they continue in this fearful condition, till "God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he has loved them," is pleased to "quicken them" by the communication of his Holy Spirit to their hearts.

This great moral change, commonly called regeneration, is the commencement of spiritual life in the soul; a life which is destined to be eternal, and to increase in strength both in the present and future world. But this requires the use of certain means which Divine wisdom has provided. Among these, a competent supply of spiritual food is not the least important. Does any one inquire, what is meant by spiritual food? The answer is ready: it is that

system of truth contained in the sacred scriptures. Divine truth is the proper aliment of the soul. Accordingly, St. Peter, addressing his brethren, says: "As new born babes desire the *sincere milk of the word*, that ye may grow thereby." It may be thought an objection, that our Saviour calls himself "the bread of life." But the difficulty will instantly vanish when we consider that it is by means of the truth contained in the Bible, that Christ is presented to the soul as the bread of life. It is from this holy book we obtain our knowledge of Christ, and of the fullness of grace and truth which is to be found in him. We are, accordingly, sometimes represented as feeding upon Christ, and sometimes upon the truth, or word of God. Both expressions have substantially the same meaning.

Let it be further remarked, that there are two principal methods by which this food is obtained. The first is, by *going directly to the Bible*, the grand repository of sacred truth. This, every Christian, in ordinary circumstances, is bound to do *daily*, and more than *once* in a day. Most people partake of temporal food *thrice* a day. And if Christians would enjoy spiritual health, they must do the same in relation to "that meat which endureth to everlasting life." Besides, as we have our stated seasons for partaking of temporal food, it is highly important that we adopt a similar arrangement in regard to

spiritual food. Particular portions of each day—say in the morning, at noon, and at night—should be devoted to the work of perusing the sacred volume, and meditating on its precious and glorious truths. And it is very important that, in attending to the Bible, we peruse it *in course;* otherwise portions, perhaps some very interesting portions of it, will be wholly neglected. Besides, we should labour to *understand* what we read; to read, and not understand, will be of no use to us. Our food does us no good unless it be *digested:* and divine truth, precious and glorious as it is, is equally useless, unless it be understood. It is almost equally important that much of the Bible be *treasured up in memory.* Truths read and forgotten, are not likely to be of any permanent benefit to the soul. They are of no use any longer than they are remembered. I could name an individual who, in early life, adopted the following method of perusing the Scriptures. He divided the whole Bible into three sections; the first comprising the Old Testament as far as the end of Esther; the second, all the remainder of the Old Testament; while the third contained the whole of the New. He read each of the three sections *in course*, and a portion of each every day. And it was his practice when he found a passage uncommonly interesting, to pay particular attention to it. If, for example, it furnished proof of any doctrine,

or contained a promise, or a threat, or an invitation, or any thing remarkably pathetic, sublime, or beautiful, or proper to be used in prayer, he was accustomed to stop, and read the passage over, leisurely, several times, until it was pretty thoroughly imprinted on his memory. He would then read on as usual. And this course he pursued for months and years. The result was that, in process of time, and without much labor, he had treasured up a very considerable portion of the whole Bible in memory, and such parts of it, too, as are peculiarly important and valuable. Hence, he found himself furnished with plenty of materials for the most profitable meditation—materials always in readiness; so that when he was engaged in secular business, or was on a journey, or was hindered in any other way from reading the Bible, its contents were so familiar that he could proceed with the most interesting trains of thought, with nearly the same pleasure and success, as he could expect to enjoy with the Bible in his hand. Such was the course adopted by the individual in question: and such were some of the benefits he derived from it. And would it not be well for all Christians who can read, to adopt a similar course? Would it not contribute greatly to promote the spirit and power of religion in their souls? And is not the neglect of this holy book one great reason why so many Christians at the present time

are in a feeble, famished, languishing condition? It is as certain as any thing demonstrated in the mathematics, that holy exercises of heart are all dependent on the truths of the Bible. Without the influence of these truths, the greatest Christian in the world would lose his spiritual life, and sink into the condition of those who are dead in tresspasses and sins. And can we wonder that such multitudes of professed Christians are at present laboring under a sad decline in regard to their spiritual life, and seem hardly adequate to the performance of any spiritual duty? The Bible is neglected by them. They seldom read it; and when they do, it is done in such a careless and hurried manner as to impart no instruction, and, consequently, no nourishment to their souls. Our temporal food does us but little good unless it be taken leisurely, and be properly digested. The same is true of that food which endureth to everlasting life.

An objector may here say "It is only a few moments of each day that we can devote to reading of any kind: and if we read the Bible as much as you recommend, we can read no other works whatever. Shall we then neglect to read the religious publications of the day? Shall we leave off taking religious newspapers and magazines? Must we dismiss all books but the Bible?"

In reply I would remark, that if an individual is

so situated that he must either dismiss his Bible, or all other books, the latter should, unquestionably, be done. The Bible contains a far richer treasure than all the other books in the world. But the alternative above stated does not often exist. Even the man who is immersed in secular business can find time, if he earnestly desires it, for reading the Bible several times in a day, and for consulting commentaries, and for perusing, at least one religious periodical besides. The same is true of the man who is so indigent that he has to labor hard for his daily bread. Early rising, a suitable division of time, and abstinence from idle conversation and vain amusements, will enable any man, who enjoys his liberty and his health, to devote more than one hour, every day, to profitable reading.

There is another method of obtaining the bread of life; and that is by *attending on the preached gospel.* This is recommended by some advantages which do not accompany the perusal of the Scriptures. The great truths of revelation as exhibited in the Bible resemble the various productions of the earth as they are found in the field, or in the store. The same truths as exhibited from the pulpit by a scribe well instructed in the kingdom of God, may be compared to food dressed under the direction of a faithful steward, and set on the table. It is on some accounts better adapted to the nourishment

of our bodies than it was in its original state. And this, no doubt, is one reason why the Lord who is so attentive to all our spiritual wants, has ordained the ministry of his word as the grand means of feeding his church and saving souls. There is this additional advantage attending the preached gospel, that if the word is skilfully divided, each hearer has such a portion of spiritual food assigned him, as his peculiar state and circumstances require. To babes in Christ *milk* is administered; while *strong meat* is provided for such of the family of God as have attained to maturity of age.

It is, however, important to observe, that there is one disadvantage attending the reception of our spiritual food from the hands of the ordinary ministers of the gospel. As they are not, however skilful and pious, divinely inspired, they are liable to adulterate the word of God by mixing errors with the truths which they exhibit. Now, whatever some may think, error is not food, but poison to the soul. And this poison is, in many cases, so intimately combined with the bread of life, and so powerfully recommended by the eloquence of the preacher, and the high rank he holds in our estimation, that we are in great danger of receiving it without hesitation, and are, consequently, liable to suffer much in regard to our spiritual health, without even suspecting the cause of our misfortune. This consideration,

however, should not hinder us from going to the house of God to hear his word dispensed; but should rather excite us to analyze all we hear from the pulpit, and to separate, as far as possible, the precious from the vile, comparing both with the infallible standard presented in the word of God. And this exercise, though at first it is likely to be somewhat painful, is eminently adapted to advance the Christian in spiritual knowledge, and, consequently, to increase his ability to digest that "strong meat," of which St. Paul speaks in the fifth chapter of his epistle to the Hebrews.

Now in regard to this latter method of obtaining the bread of life, there is, unquestionably, a most criminal neglect on the part of professors of religion. They do not attend on the preached word so punctually as they ought, and a large portion of those who do attend with a good degree of punctuality on the Sabbath, are still neglectful of religious meetings on secular days, and frequently absent themselves without any good reason. Nor is this all. They do not hear, when they do attend, with becoming interest. Their thoughts are too often wandering, with the fool's eye, to the ends of the earth. And, frequently, when their attention is sufficiently fixed, they hear as mere speculatists, without applying the truth to themselves, and mixing it with faith. Hence, though

interested and *entertained*, they are not *profited;* they get no food for their souls. This, alas! seems to be true of multitudes of professors at the present day, even of such as are assiduous in their attendance on the ministry of the word. The gospel comes to them rather as the word of man, than as the word of God. Hence, though it may please them, it is of no real benefit. They go to the sanctuary of God, as people go to the theatre, to be *amused;* and no wonder that amusement is all they obtain. The most evangelical and able discourses are in a great measure lost upon them. An abundance of the bread of life is set before them. They look upon it, admire it, and praise it. And there the matter ends. They do not *feed* upon it, and therefore pine and languish in the midst of plenty.

There are many who neglect the preached word, under the pretence that the man who dispenses it is not an interesting preacher. He is not so learned, or so ingenious, or so eloquent, as he should be. He does nothing more than exhibit plain truth in a plain manner. They want something different. They resemble the Israelites in the wilderness who became tired of the *manna* which God had given them, and desired *flesh*. God sent them flesh in abundance, and with it sent the most fearful tokens of his wrath. And persons who indulge the spirit of those perverse Israelites have reason to tremble lest

he should adopt a similar course with respect to themselves, and, while he "grants them their request, should send leanness into their souls." Alas! alas! in how many instances has he done it already? And let it be remembered that professors of the above description are very numerous. What multitudes there are who cannot hear a gospel sermon unless it contain a great many fine figures, and what they call *new and striking thoughts*, embellished with the charms of language and the graces of oratory! Such persons, I am. sure, would have considered St. Paul a very dull preacher. How could they bear to hear a man who came to them, "not with excellency of speech or of wisdom," and who "determined not to know any thing among them save Jesus Christ and him crucified"? But such preaching as that of Paul was, after all, as good, at least, as the fashionable preaching of the present day. People who paid a proper attention to the preaching of this great apostle were "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." His discourses were full of Christ that bread of God which came down from heaven. And I cannot but think that in proportion as Christian ministers of the present day resemble St. Paul, their sermons and other discourses will be edifying to the man who hears them with right feelings of heart. He will grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ; while those who, loathing this

heavenly manna, are seeking something else, must, though real Christians, be weak, and dwarfish, and sickly, and, unless their course be changed, must wait a long time before they attain to the stature of perfect men in Christ.

CHAPTER II.

Improper connections with the ungodly.

That physical health is often destroyed by associating freely with persons afflicted with contagious diseases, is a fact too well known to need any proof. And this evil has its counterpart in the moral and spiritual world. By indulging ourselves in improper intimacies with ungodly men, we are in great danger of becoming infected with their spirit, and of copying their example. It is indeed true, that, so long as we are in the world, we must have some intercourse with unrenewed men; not only with the decent and the moral, but with those who are distinguished by vice and wickedness. We frequently have secular business to transact with such men. We are sometimes united to them by ties of affinity

or consanguinity. And it is often our duty to go among them in order to reclaim them from the error of their ways. Accordingly, St. Paul intimates to his Corinthian brethren that they could not always avoid the company, even of fornicators, unless they would go out of the world. Our Saviour himself associated with publicans and sinners that he might have opportunity of speaking to them the words of eternal life, and of rescuing them from that state of moral pollution and degradation into which they had fallen. Nor will any one deny that this was one of the loveliest traits in the character of Him whose errand into the world was, "not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance;" or assert that it is not lawful for his disciples to copy this excellence in his character. No, it unquestionably becomes his people, and especially his ministers, to "go into the streets and lanes, the highways and hedges," and labour to persuade the vilest of mankind to come to that feast which eternal wisdom has provided. And, blessed be God, many of his people are assiduously and successfully employed, at present, in this labor of love. And they need not fear the contaminating influence of so intimate an intercourse with the profligate and vicious. The grace which has prompted them to undertake this benevolent and holy enterprise, is sufficient to pro-

tect them, and *will* protect them against the moral infection to which they are exposed.

But there are connections with unrenewed men of a character very different from those to which I have now adverted. Many a professor of religion has, without the least necessity, formed alliances, political, social, or matrimonial, with individuals whose views of religion were essentially corrupt, and whose morals, to say the least, did not rise above the depressed standard of public opinion —a standard far less elevated than that of our Saviour and his apostles. And these alliances have had the effect on each of the persons in question which might have been expected. His situation has, to the interests of his soul, been dangerous in the extreme. His moral atmosphere has, almost continually, been loaded with pestilence and death. He has gradually become assimilated to the character of his associates: has imbibed their spirit, has embraced the maxims of worldly wisdom by which he found them governed, and has become polluted with all the moral diseases which had spread their deleterious influences around him. The evil to which I have now adverted is one of general prevalence, and threatens to extend itself over the whole religious community. It is that friendship of the world which is enmity with God, and which tends so eminently to destroy the impress of his holiness on

the children of his grace. It was against this evil that St. Paul lifted his warning voice in his second epistle to the church in Corinth, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." A disregard of this direction, of the reasons on which it is founded, and of the cheering assurance by which it is enforced, is one of the prominent causes of the low state of religion among us. It has polluted and paralyzed the Christian community; and, unless counteracted, must soon reduce it to one fearful mass of moral corruption, and entirely obliterate the distinction, once so fair and legible, between the church of Jesus Christ, and the world that lies in wickedness.

CHAPTER III.

Spiritual Indolence.

A proper attention to *exercise*, is well known to be essential to the health of the body. However strong and vigorous the physical constitution of an individual, his strength in a short time will be greatly impaired, if exercise be wholly neglected. Should the most athletic person you can name betake himself to his bed, and lie there the whole time for several months, he will scarcely be able, at the expiration of that time, to walk across the floor of his apartment. And he will be singularly fortunate if disease has not invaded his enfeebled frame. Now there is, in this respect, a striking analogy between the body and the soul. The latter needs exercise as much as the former. A want of suitable employment tends greatly to enervate the intellectual powers, and to disqualify them for those vigorous efforts to which they are naturally adapted. The same holds when man is considered as a moral and spiritual being. Let the Christian who is blessed with the most vigorous spiritual health, neglect to exercise those gifts and graces with which the Lord has endowed him, and though he were a Sampson in "the sacramental host," he must soon lose his

giant strength, and, on account of the weakness he betrays, become the sport and derision of the enemies of God.

It deserves to be remembered here, that it is not every kind of exercise which will answer the purpose. It is now generally agreed that such labor as is ordinarily performed by the industrious part of the community is most conducive to bodily health. Those gymnastic exercises which were so much in vogue a few years since, have nearly all been laid aside. Experience has decided that they are not so beneficial to the physical system, as those agricultural and mechanical exercises in which the great mass of mankind are generally engaged, and from which their subsistence is derived. The labors of the farm and of the mechanics' shop, have, for this, as well as for other reasons, been substituted in our seminaries of learning for those of the gymnasium, which were formerly so much extolled. It is now settled that *productive* labor is most conducive to bodily health. And can any one doubt whether the same holds in regard to *spiritual* health? *Productive* labor in a spiritual sense, is labor adapted to promote the glory of God, and the salvation of men; in other words, it is the labor which God requires; it is obedience to his commands. And this his people invariably find most conducive to their moral and spiritual health. Exercises not enjoined by the

word of God, have no tendency to invigorate the Christian's spiritual powers. They may increase his strength as an intellectual being. No doubt the sagacity of wicked men and devils has often been augmented by the efforts which they have made in opposition to Christ and his kingdom. But the system of holy affections existing in the Christian's heart is never strengthened, but invariably weakened, by such labors, however regular and systematic, as are not enjoined, or authorized, by the word of God. It is the neglect of those exercises which God requires ; in other words, the neglect of *duty*, which, for some time past, has been weakening the spiritual energies of his people. They have, perhaps, been busily employed ; not, however, in serving God or their generation according to his will, but in useless speculations, or in sharp disputes and angry controversies ; or in efforts to advance their own sect, to the injury, if not to the ruin, of other sects ; or in unjustifiable endeavors to obtain the riches, honors, and pleasures of the world. There has been too much ground for the complaint against professors of our day, which St. Paul uttered against professors of his time ; " All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." A constant and vigorous effort to advanee his cause, in conformity with the directions of his word, is rarely to be met with. In regard to this matter, though in-

finitely momentous, the wise and foolish virgins seem to be slumbering together. No wonder, then, that the former are in a feeble and languishing condition. If the reverse were true, we must consider the order of nature, in regard to intellectual and moral beings, as essentially subverted.

CHAPTER IV.

Want of a suitable Control over our Thoughts.

"Keep thy heart with all diligence," is one of the most important of those rules for which we are indebted to the wisest of men. The consideration which he adduces to enforce the rule, is equally deserving of our attention. "For out of it," that is, out of the heart, "are the issues of life;" meaning either that a man's life and conversation will correspond with the state of his heart, just as the stream is pure, or otherwise, according to the quality of the fountain; or else, that out of a heart well kept will flow the streams of a holy life and godly conversation, pleasing to God, and beneficial to ourselves and all around us. In either sense, keeping the heart

must be a work of vast importance; a work in which we ought to be industriously and unremittingly employed. Accordingly, the sacred writer who has given us the direction, says, not simply, "keep thy heart," but keep it "with *diligence;*" nay, "with *all* diligence." The most constant and persevering assiduity, in the view of this inspired philosopher and sage, was not too much to be employed by any man in keeping his heart. The direction is, indeed, one of wide extent, embracing the whole range of duties which we are bound to discharge in relation to our intellectual and moral nature. The full illustration of it, therefore, would require a volume, instead of a single chapter, or part of a chapter, rather, of a short essay. I shall, of course, leave the general subject untouched, and shall confine myself to the single point which stands connected with my present object, namely, *the proper regulation of our thoughts.* This, to every man who is acquainted with the philosophy of the human mind, or who has been at all accustomed to observe his own mental processes, must appear a very difficult task. It is only to a certain extent that our thoughts are under our control. A succession of ideas in the mind is unavoidable. The greatest effort on our part to detain an idea to the exclusion of all other ideas, is not sufficient to ensure success for any great length of time. Other thoughts will crowd in, and banish

for a season *that* which we are seeking to detain. The various relations among our thoughts, such as those of cause and effect, of resemblance and contrast, and of contiguity in time and place, exert a mighty influence on our intellectual powers, and proportionably increase the difficulty of subjecting them to proper regulation. Nor is this all. We have strong reason to believe that those "principalities and powers" of which the Bible speaks, those "spiritual wickednesses in high places" which it represents as "rulers of the darkness of this world," frequently inject into the mind, even of a good man, a variety of thoughts so intrinsically bad, that did he not suspect the cause from which they were derived, he must consider himself as utterly destitute of the grace of God. Still, there is much which we have it in our power to do for the regulation of our thoughts. When, as often happens, several trains of thought are presented to the mind, it can select one of them, and pursue it, disregarding the rest. It can vary the train of thought by change of scenery, or change of company, or change of books. And by cherishing a particular tone of mind, it can secure a succession of ideas in harmony with it. And so far as we have ability to control and regulate our thoughts, we are, doubtless, under obligation to do it. We are, of course, guilty in the sight of God, if instead of *exercising* this ability,

we suffer our intellectual movements to resemble those of a ship which has no rudder, and, consequently, is made the sport of every wind that blows.*

In the regulation of our thoughts, the grand object should be to secure such a succession of them as is adapted to foster right feelings of heart. It cannot have escaped the notice of any reflecting man, that as certain states of mind give rise to corresponding thoughts; so certain thoughts are suited to cherish and promote certain states of mind. If, for example, you have received an *injury* from one of your fellow men; your thinking of that injury and bringing into view the various circumstances of aggravation by which it was attended, has a powerful tendency to increase your resentment towards its author. In like manner, if you have received a signal *favor* from any one, the more you revolve it in your thoughts, the livelier will be your emotions of gratitude towards your benefactor. Hence, wherever there exists a principle of real piety, it can hardly fail to be cherished and heightened by meditating on the being and perfections of God, and particularly, on that boundless *grace* which he has so signally manifested in the stupendous work of man's redemption. Such meditations are most admirably suited to inspire us with love and gratitude to God,

* See Elements of Criticism.

with godly sorrow for sin, with humble submission to the divine will; with holy confidence in the divine promises, and, indeed, with all those devout affections which the sacred volume enjoins. It is equally true, that whenever a pious man allows himself to think without necessity, of the riches, honors and pleasures of the world; and, especially, when these become *daily* and *hourly* the subjects of his meditation, the current of his thoughts is directly calculated to foster a worldly spirit, and proportionably to diminish and destroy the spirit of real piety.

That this is one of the prominent evils of the present day, is to the writer exceedingly manifest. He does not, indeed, presume to invade the province of Him whose dread prerogative it is to search the heart and try the reins. But if he may trust to that criterion which the great Preacher of righteousness has furnished, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," he need not hesitate to aver, that the thoughts of most professors of religion have, for a long time, been principally occupied with subjects of a worldly nature. They have been saying, "What shall we eat?" and "What shall we drink?" and "Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" Or, if raised above indigence and dependence, they have been inquiring how they might secure the property which they have acquired, and acquire more. What multitudes, too, have been employed in dis-

cussing the political questions of the day; or in canvassing the merits of some favorite classic author; or in detailing the blemishes and beauties to be found in the productions of some new aspirant for a place among the elegant writers of the age! Meantime, how little has been said of Him who is "God manifest in the flesh," "the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his person;" or of that great redemption which he came into the world to accomplish; or of the precious soul, and its depraved and ruined state; or of that dread eternity to which it is bound! And with these facts, can we reasonably doubt with what objects the *thoughts* of men, even of professed Christians, have been principally occupied? Or can we wonder that, under these circumstances, the religious state of the Christian community has been sinking lower and lower? If the current of our thoughts exerts the important influence, which we have represented it as exerting, on the feelings our hearts, our hearts cannot fail to be in a wretched state, when for days, and weeks, and months, the subjects of our contemplation are principally of a worldly nature.

It will, indeed, be readily admitted, that most men are under the necessity of devoting a large portion of their time to secular affairs; and, of course, are obliged to think, more or less, on subjects of a secular nature; since nobody can properly attend to

business of any kind without bestowing some thought upon it. But let conscience speak, and it will declare, that a large portion of our worldly thoughts have no tendency to promote the success of our worldly business. To say nothing of those speculations in which men of a peculiar cast of mind indulge, and which savor more of the ravings of insanity than of the chastened operations of a sound understanding—speculations in which the individual supposes himself to experience the most surprising elevations of fortune; to make his way in a few months, and even in a few days, from indigence and obscurity to the very pinnacle of worldly greatness; how true it is that a very large proportion of men's thoughts respecting their secular affairs, which cannot be denominated romantic or extravagant, are nevertheless entirely superfluous, contribute nothing to the maturity or perfection of their worldly schemes, and serve no other purpose than to foster a wordly spirit, and to exclude the thoughts of God, and eternal realities from their minds! We cannot have a clearer proof of this point than the well known fact that at those seasons in which the people of God are blessed with a revival of religion in their souls, and live for a time truly devoted to God, their thoughts are almost exclusively employed in the contemplation of heavenly things, and still their worldly business is as well

managed, and is prosecuted, to say the least, with as much success, as it was when it engrossed their whole attention.

CHAPTER V.

Neglect of prayer; particularly, of SECRET *prayer.*

As that prayer which is acceptable to God, implies right feelings of heart; so the right performance of this duty has a powerful tendency to preserve the heart in a holy and heavenly frame, and to prevent those spiritual decays which the disciples of Christ too often experience. The very act of approaching unto God, and holding converse with him, is admirably adapted to inspire us with those holy affections which he requires, and the possession of which is so ennobling to the human mind. Engaging in the duty of prayer necessarily involves a direction of the mind towards Him in whose character all possible excellencies are combined; to whom belong the incomprehensible attributes of omnipresence, omniscience, and almighty power; whose righteousness is like the great mountains, and whose judgments are a mighty deep; who is so

pure that the heavens are not clean in his sight; and so bountiful and gracious that he causes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth his rain on the just and on the unjust; nay, so compassionate and kind, that he has given his only begotten and well-beloved Son to suffer and die for our rebellious race, that whosoever believeth in him may not perish but have eternal life; and who, while he sways his sceptre over all worlds, is so managing the vast concerns of the universe as to render them all subservient to his own glory, and to the highest happiness of his moral kingdom. It cannot appear strange, therefore, that the man who has daily intercourse with God, should habitually feel that reverence and Godly fear which he requires, should possess a large measure of genuine humility, should mourn for sin after godly sort, and at the same time should cherish that holy confidence in God so eminently suited both to tranquillize the mind, amidst all the changes and revolutions of the world, and to prepare it for vigorous efforts in the cause of Christ and of human happiness. Nor is it less true that the duty of prayer, rightly performed, is admirably adapted to make a man feel the real dignity of his nature. Nothing shows the greatness of the human mind in so striking a light as its possession of those capacities and powers which qualify it to know, to serve, and to enjoy its Creator. The prayerless

man has no idea of the real grandeur of his own soul. Estranged from God, he cannot know what pure and exalted pleasures his intellectual and moral nature is fitted to enjoy. He has pride and vanity in abundance; but no just sense of the dignity of his nature. Nor can he ever attain it till he knows by happy experience what it is to approach unto God, and exercise towards him those pious affections which the right performance of the duty of prayer necessarily involves. It is equally true, that when the real Christian neglects this duty, he loses in a great measure those views and feelings of which the man who *never* prays is habitually and totally destitute; and is, of course, deprived of that security against declension and apostasy which the people of God, in their best days, are wont to enjoy.

But we must not stop here. The duty of prayer is especially valuable as a means of obtaining from Him whom we address, the various blessings of which we stand in need. *God hears and answers prayer.* Of this no one can entertain a doubt who believes the declarations of the inspired volume. It asserts in the plainest terms the availableness of prayer. It represents the Almighty as saying to each of his people, "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee; and thou shalt glorify me." It assures us that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." It introduces

our Saviour as saying to his disciples, "Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children; how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him!" Now the duty of prayer must be highly important to us, if it be thus prevalent with God; especially, if by means of it we can obtain the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is better, unspeakably better, than all the riches, honors, and pleasures of the world. To have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us as our teacher, sanctifier, and comforter, is to be filled with all the fulness of God; to have Christ in us the hope of glory; to be blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places; nay, to be temples of the living God, and to experience, on earth, the earnest and the commencement of eternal life and glory in heaven. How conducive, then, must the duty of prayer be to the Christian's spiritual prosperity! and how great the loss which he must sustain from the habitual neglect of it! And can we doubt whether this neglect is one cause of the low state of religion among us?

"But is it true that the duty of prayer *is* neglected by the people of God? Do they not assemble

as usual for religious worship on the Lord's day? Do not many assemble for the same purpose in the vestry, or conference room, on secular days? And do not Christians generally offer the morning and evening sacrifices on the family altar?"

That these duties are performed by many will be readily granted. But is it not a lamentable truth, that many professors of religion absent themselves a large portion of the time from our worshipping assemblies on the Lord's day? that in many places the vestry and the conference room are almost deserted? and that the family altar in many Christian families is seldom approached? and is it not equally true that, when the duty of prayer *is* performed, it is generally characterized by such coldness and formality, as hardly to deserve the name of prayer? There seems to be little or nothing of that holy warmth and fervor by which the prayers of God's people were once distinguished. And can it be supposed that when *social* prayer is so much neglected, or so heartlessly performed, *secret* prayer, if performed at all, is characterized by those feelings of heart which render it acceptable to God?

Let it be here remarked that the neglect of *secret* prayer is probably a principal cause of the neglect, or unacceptable performance of the duty of *social* prayer, and of all that stupidity and worldliness, and inattention to the things of God of which, at

at present, there is so much reason to complain. It is an old and a just saying among pious people, that "*declension begins at the closet door.*" A professor of religion is much more likely to neglect *secret* than *social* prayer. He cannot neglect the latter without exposing himself to the animadversions and reproaches of both saints and sinners; nor, consequently, without impairing his reputation as a religious man. His absence from the meeting house, or the vestry, or the family altar, at the usual seasons of devotion, cannot fail to be noticed and censured by those around him. His fellow Christians who are steadfast in their profession cannot witness such neglect without feelings of regret and disapprobation. Nor can it escape the sentence of condemnation from unconverted men, who, though they have no proper regard to religion themselves, perceive the glaring inconsistency which marks the conduct of those who profess to be her votaries, and yet pay little or no attention to the duties which she enjoins. Hence, many a professor is induced to attend on the stated exercises of social prayer, although he has lost his interest in them, and no longer feels that it is good for him to draw near to God. But the same does not hold in regard to *secret* prayer. This may be neglected for weeks and months, without exposing the delinquent to censure or reproach. There is, accordingly, much reason to fear that it *is* neglected by multitudes of professors whose

reputation as religious men stands high, and whose seat is seldom empty at any of the appointed seasons of social worship. But the omission of closet duties is eminently prejudicial to the power of godliness in the soul. It is in the closet we have the freest, the most intimate, and the most ennobling intercourse with the Father of our spirits. It is there, especially, that we "*draw near to God*," and "pour out our hearts before him." In the closet, we can be as *particular as we please* in confessing our sins, in naming the trials and temptations which have befallen us, in recounting the various blessings which we have received, and in asking for those of which we stand in need. Accordingly, it is in the closet that the engaged Christian finds relief from the burdens and overwhelming anxieties which he experiences: and it is there he enjoys those foretastes of heaven which wean him from the world, secure him against temptation to sin, and stimulate him to the vigorous discharge of all the duties of the Christian life. Indeed, the lively, devoted Christian finds in his closet a fountain of living waters, in partaking of which, his soul is daily refreshed and satisfied, and prepared to "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." It is preeminently true in regard to his secret devotions, that by "waiting on the Lord he renews his strength," and, filled with the Holy Spirit, is enabled to "mount up as

on eagles' wings; to run and not be weary; to walk, and not faint." And can he neglect an exercise so conducive to his preservation from sin, and to his growth in grace without experiencing a sad decline in his spiritual condition? This neglect is, unquestionably, one cause of the low state of religion among us. The result of it is an entire destitution of the means of defence against our spiritual foes. There is nothing like intercourse with God in the closet to fortify us against the allurements of the world, the assaults of the prince of darkness, or the depraved dispositions of our own hearts. Besides, we may lay it down as a rule that, watching and praying go together. We never watch as we ought, unless we pray. Watching, without praying, is a presumptuous reliance on our own wisdom and strength, and, of course, contributes nothing to our safety. If we watch aright, we have a deep sense of our own insufficiency, and of our dependence on Him in whom are boundless knowledge and everlasting strength. It is the vigilance of one whose soul is filled with adoring thoughts of the all-pervading presence and agency of Jehovah; and who, while disposed to walk amid surrounding dangers with a cautious circumspection, feels that his help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. And this holy vigilance, which, as we have seen, implies a punctual and faithful discharge

of closet duties, is one of our best securities against defection; nay, without a good degree of it, no Christian was ever able to maintain a close and humble walk with God. An unwatchful frame of mind is the almost certain precursor of declension and apostasy.

There is another point of view in which the neglect of secret prayer may account in a very satisfactory manner for the present low state of religion among us. There is scarce any duty the omission of which is more offensive to God. It involves a most criminal disregard of his favor, and of the manifestations of that love which he bears to his people. Suppose a man of very high rank in society, and of distinguished excellence, both intellectua and moral, should manifest to me a peculiar attachment; should release me from prison and from chains, at a very great expense, should raise me to an honourable post in the community; and, among other tokens of his favor, should invite me to pass half an hour with him in retirement, every morning and evening, for the purpose of free conversation on subjects intimately connected with my present happiness and future prospects. Suppose that, for several months, I am punctual in my compliance with his generous invitation. I repair to the mansion where he resides, every morning and evening, and am always greeted with a hearty wel-

come. He meets me at the door, takes me by the hand, leads me to his presence-chamber, converses with me in the most condescending and gracious manner, gives me his best advice in all my perplexities, sympathizes with me in all my sorrows and joys, and kindly proffers his assistance whenever I may need it. And suppose that, during the whole time of my intimacy with him, he has not, in a single instance, given me the least ground for dissatisfaction. Suppose again, that, after the expiration of a few months, becoming tired of these interviews, I neglect to repair to the house of my generous friend, and do not see him in private for a long time. What must be his feelings? How pungent the sense he must have of my baseness and folly! How vile the ingratitude which, in his estimation, my conduct betrays! And how little reason shall I have to wonder if, provoked by so outrageous a violation of generosity and friendship, he resolve to withdraw the tokens of his favor from me, and leave me to sink into the state of sbscurity and wretchedness from which he had raised me! Nor should I at all mend the matter by frequently attending his levee, and saluting him there with seeming cordiality, as though nothing unpleasant had happened between us. Would he deign to give me his hand, or any token of his favor? Nay, would he not consider this show of friendship to him in public, as the

grossest insult which I could offer him? And, instead of honoring me with a place among his favorites, would he not spurn me from his presence, as deserving nothing but the severest tokens of his displeasure? It is hardly necessary for me to apply this similitude to the point in hand. This the judicious reader has already done, and he has at the same time observed that the figure, though in many respects a striking one, falls far short, as it necessarily must, of adequately representing the case before us. The goodness of the benefactor, and the baseness of the individual supposed to be indebted to his bounty, bear no proportion, on the one hand, to the goodness of God; or, on the other, to the baseness of those Christians, who, tired of communion with him, neglect, for weeks and months, to meet him in the closet. And can we wonder if, thus slighted and abused, he withhold from such ungrateful creatures the communications of his grace, and leave them destitute of the light of his countenance and the joy of his salvation?

CHAPTER VI.

Temporal Prosperity.

It is the saying of an inspired apostle, that "the goodness of God leadeth unto repentance." This is, no doubt, its natural tendency. And when holy affections exert a governing influence over us, repentance, and that obedience which repentance necessarily implies, are invariably produced in us by every exhibition of divine goodness, and, consequently by that temporal prosperity which we so frequently enjoy; for this is, in all cases, to be ascribed to the goodness of God. Whatever efforts we make for promoting our temporal welfare, our success is invariably owing to the smiles of his providence.

That ungodly men, instead of being brought to repentance by the temporal blessings which divine goodness bestows upon them, are, on the contrary, rendered more bold and presumptuous in their sinful courses, the inspired volume abundantly testifies. In the book of Job, it is said, "Wherefore do the wicked live, become old; yea, are mighty in power? Their seed is established before them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them.

——They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ." In other words, they are men whom the goodness of God has blessed with abundant prosperity. And what effect does this prosperity have upon them? Does it lead them up to God as the bountiful bestower of every good? No, truly. "They say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him? And what profit shall we have if we pray unto him?" A similar complaint is made by the author of the 73d psalm. He is speaking of "the ungodly, who prosper in the world, and increase in riches." And he tells us "they are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men." Nay, "their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish." And do they acknowledge and adore the gracious hand which has so signally blessed them? No; "they set their mouth against the heavens, and say, how doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?" The same affecting truth is exhibited in that saying of the wise man, "Because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil;" in which passage, the goodness of God, in sparing sinful men, and contin-

uing to bestow upon them the blessings of his providence, is assigned as a reason of their hardening themselves against him, and filling up the measure of their iniquity. Instances of this kind have existed in all past ages; and they are to be met with in abundance at the present day.

"But is it true that God's people ever abuse his goodness in this manner?" At first view, we should probably all suppose the thing impossible. That the heart which has been humbled before God, and subdued by the power of his grace, should be chargeable with a fault so directly contrary to the spirit of piety, we could hardly believe. Judging from the nature of that holy love which is the essence of real piety, it would seem evident that the manifestation of divine goodness in providence, as well as in redemption, must always melt the heart of the regenerated man, and inspire him with emotions of penitence and gratitude. We should draw the same conclusion from the effect which we know is actually produced on the humbled sinner when he first gives himself to Christ. Among the most powerful means employed for subduing and melting his heart, we may reckon the view afforded him of the love of God in sending his Son to die for sinners. Nothing seems to affect him so much as the strength, the freeness, and the sovereignty of that love. It appears to involve reasons for love and

gratitude, on his part, and also for contrition and obedience, which are quite irresistible. Nor is the humbled sinner unaffected with the goodness of God as manifested in *providence*. He is greatly affected to think how long he has been spared, and sustained, and blessed with health, and food, and raiment, and friends, and prosperity, in his secular pursuits, while his heart has been opposed to the divine government, and his conduct in a multitude of instances, a most direct and palpable violation of the divine commands. And he cannot believe that the goodness of God, as manifested, either in providence or redemption, can ever have a different effect upon him.

Still, nothing is more evident than that the goodness of God, as manifested in the temporal prosperity which he affords, may be abused, not only by the ungodly, but by pious and holy men, in direct contrariety to all the sanctified affections of their hearts.

There can be no doubt that it was under the influence of temporal prosperity that David was prompted to the commission of those sins which so sadly tarnished his religious character, and inflicted so deep a wound on the cause of God. Not long, it seems, previous to his fall, he had been remarkably successful in the wars he had waged against the surrounding nations. The Philistines, the Moab-

ites, and the Syrians, at that time a powerful nation, had been recently subdued. And "David," says the inspired historian, "gat him a name, when he returned from smiting the Syrians in the valley of Salt, being eighteen thousand men. And he put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom put he garrisons; and all they of Edom became David's servants. And the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went." And while he had this great success in his wars with other nations, there was no revolt among his own subjects. They were all, it would seem, satisfied with his government, and attached to his interest. It is, accordingly, added, that "David reigned over all Israel." And what is the effect of this signal prosperity on the mind of this great and good man? Is he thankful, and humble, and obedient, to the divine commands? No, truly. He is chargeable with seduction, and adultery, and murder; under circumstances, too, which render his guilt uncommonly great and aggravated. Do any doubt whether the rapidity with which, by the assistance of divine providence, he had risen from one stage of royal greatness to another, was the occasion of the signal apostasy with which he was chargeable? Let them consider in what manner he conducted himself, before the period of his prosperity commenced. From the time he was anointed by Samuel to that in which he ascended the

throne of Judah, he was generally in a very afflicted state. Hunted by Saul as a partridge on the mountains, and exposed to hardships and dangers innumerable; nay, sometimes compelled to fly from his native land, and seek an asylum among the enemies of Israel, his condition was as trying as can well be imagined. And during all this time, he acted the part of a humble, pious man, devoted to the interests of religion and of his country. Nor have we any reason to doubt but that he would have pursued the same course to the end of life, had not the great temporal prosperity with which divine providence indulged him, corrupted his mind, and led him astray from the path of wisdom.

We may say much the same in regard to Solomon, the son and successor of David. His defection is indeed ascribed to the influence of the "outlandish women" belonging to his court. But we cannot, I think, suppose that they would ever have induced him to promote the abominable idolatries of the heathen, by building temples to Moloch, and Chemosh, and Milcom, had not his heart been corrupted by the unexampled prosperity which he had previously enjoyed.

The case of Hezekiah is much in point. He was, we know, an eminently pious and godly man, and one of the best princes who ever swayed a sceptre over the kindom of Judah. He did much to cleanse

his country from the impurities of idolatry, and to restore the worship of Jehovah among his subjects. And during the invasion under Sennacherib, king of Assyria, he showed himself to be, indeed, a servant of the living God. Of this, the memorable prayer which he offered up in the temple, on that trying occasion, furnishes the most satisfactory proof. But the honor done him by the king of Babylon, who sent a solemn embassy to congratulate him on account of his recovery from his late sickness, and to inquire respecting the wonder done in the land, when the sun returned ten degrees backward, operated most injuriously on his spiritual feelings. "His heart was lifted up to his destruction," instead of being expanded with gratitude to God. Finding himself placed on the list of the great men of the earth, he forgot the gracious hand which had delivered him from the Assyrian invasion, and rescued him from sickness and death. O how dangerous to the soul is that honor which cometh from man! Like every other kind of temporal prosperity, it frequently becomes the means of corrupting the heart, and turning it away from God.

The ancient Jewish church furnishes a very striking illustration of the subject before us. You will find a passage much to our present purpose, in Moses' song, recorded in the 32d chapter of Deuteronomy. "Remember the days of old; consider the

years of many generations. Ask thy father, and he will show thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee. When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance; when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel." That is, he had from the beginning, marked out Palestine, "the glory of all lands," as the destined possession of his chosen people. It is, accordingly, added, "For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, in a waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him; he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings; taketh them, beareth them upon her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange God with him," to challenge a part of the glory due to him on account of what he had done for Israel. It is added, "He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock; butter of kine and milk of sheep, with the fat of lambs and rams, of the breed of Basham, and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of wheat; and thou didst drink of the pure blood of the grape." Thus highly is Israel blessed of God. No other nation ever enjoyed such tokens of his favor.

And what returns do they make to Jehovah for these manifestions of his goodness? Are they grateful and obedient in proportion to the prosperity with which he has indulged them? No, that very prosperity is the principal occasion of their departure from the Lord. "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked; thou art waxed fat; thou are grown thick; thou art covered with fatness. Then he forsook God that made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation."

Such was the effect of temporal prosperity on the Jewish church. The Christian church was affected by it in much the same way. She lost her spirituality and purity in consequence of the emoluments and honors lavished upon her by Constantine the Great, and some of his successors. This was the real origin of the great apostasy in the Christian church—an apostasy which changed the spouse of Christ into "the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth."

With all these facts before us, can we deem it incredible that the church in these United States should be injured in the same way? Perhaps no nation ever enjoyed a greater share of temporal prosperity than ours has generally done, since the close of our revolutionary conflict. Blessed with the freest government on the face of the earth, with wise and salutary laws, and with almost unexampled success in

the various departments of peaceful industry, we have risen with great rapidity to wealth and power. And in this sudden elevation of rank and fortune, the members of our churches have had a share. Great numbers who profess religion, and many, no doubt, who are Christians indeed, have risen to eminence as merchants and as statesmen, and consequently have been exposed to the contaminating influence of wealth and honor on the human heart.— The same influence has been felt on a smaller scale, but with almost equally injurious effects, by such of our farmers and mechanics as profess to be the followers of Christ. Indeed, it has been felt through almost every part of the religious community, and has greatly increased a worldly spirit. Alas, how many professors of religion most evidently look to the things which are seen and temporal, rather than to those which are unseen and eternal! Basking in the sunshine of prosperity, they speak, and act, and feel, like those "who have their portion in this life," and who consider the riches, honors, and pleasures of the world as the chief good.

CHAPTER VII.

Desecration of the Sabbath.

"The Sabbath," our Lord assures us, "was made for man." It is an institution designed, and pre-eminently adapted, to promote the best interests of the human race. It is especially beneficial because, when properly observed, it contributes to the preservation and increase in the minds of men of that *sense of religion*, on which their happiness, both here and hereafter, so much depends. The regular return of a day of holy rest, after six days devoted to the business of the world, is a rich blessing to mankind by affording leisure for meditation and prayer, and reading the word of God, in private; and also for those public exercises of devotion which usually characterize the observance of the Sabbath in Christian lands. Accordingly, the people of God, when blessed with much of his Spirit, never fail to rejoice in the return of the Sabbath: and they generally obtain that refreshment to their souls, the relish of which is not lost during the remainder of the week.

It is however true, that the benefit resulting from the Sabbath depends on the manner in which it is

kept. Every deviation from the requisite *strictness* detracts from the utility of the institution. I am not indeed about to assert, that Christians are bound to observe the Sabbath in all respects with the same degree of strictness which was enjoined under the Mosaic economy. We are not, for example, forbidden, as the ancient Israelites were, to *kindle a fire* on the Sabbath. The condition of the Jewish church resembled that of a child during its minority, when a variety of restraints are necessary which cannot, without manifest impropriety, be continued after the individual has arrived at adult age. This remark I derive from St. Paul. In his epistle to the Galatian Christians, after saying, "And if ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise," the apostle adds, "Now the heir, so long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors, until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world." Accordingly, St. Peter speaks of the ceremonial law as "a yoke which," says he, "neither we nor our fathers were able to bear." One of the restraints which this yoke embraced, consisted in the rigid exactness with which the observance of the Sabbath was enjoined. And some Christians, with good intentions no doubt, though certainly without any sufficient warrant from the word of

God, have in some respects imitated the strictness of the Jewish observance. But after making this concession, I must say, that, at the present time, the danger, and the *only* danger, appears to lie on the other side. The day, unquestionably, should be considered as pre-eminently holy, and the whole of it, except what is devoted to works of necessity and mercy, should be employed in those religious exercises, which are adapted to promote the salvation of the soul and the glory of God.

In mentioning violations of the Sabbath, I shall not insist on those of the grossest kind. I shall say nothing, particularly of the habitual neglect of public worship on the Sabbath, or of employing the time in the business of the farm or of the shop, or in posting accounts, or in making bargains, or in writing business letters, or in taking journeys, or in preparing sumptuous entertainments. For these are all such palpable violations of that holy day, that professors of religion who have any regard to their Christian character are not likely to be chargeable with them. But there is *one practice* which, though it is as *real* a violation of the Sabbath as any of the things just mentioned, seems to have escaped, with little or no censure, even among the generality of religious people. I allude to the practice of *conversing* on topics of a secular nature, on the Sabbath. I do not hesitate to call this a violation of the

day. For I cannot conceive how it can be *wrong* to engage in worldly business on the Sabbath, and *right* to converse on worldly subjects. The latter exercise is, usually, more engrossing to the mind than the former; and, consequently, tends proportionably more to call off the attention from God and heavenly things. The pious farmer can be following his plough, or repairing his fences, or sowing his seed, or gathering in the fruits of harvest, and at the same time be meditating on divine subjects. We can hardly say the same in relation to *conversation* on any subjects of a worldly nature. It generally, while it continues, engages our principal, if not our whole, attention. It has of course, a much greater tendency than worldly business, to secularize the feelings of a pious man, and to draw off his thoughts from those momentous subjects to which on the Sabbath they ought to be exclusively directed. Even on *secular days*, a great deal of time ought, in ordinary circumstances, to be spent in speaking one to another of the things of God. This we find is universally the case in times of revival; and no substantial reason can be assigned why the same practice should not prevail at all *other* times. How guilty, then, must those professors of religion be, who, although they abstain on the Sabbath from worldly business, allow themselves to converse freely on politics, on the public news, on the state of

the markets, on the fruits of the earth, and on other subjects of a similar nature! And it deserves to be considered that this desecration of the Sabbath, on the part of professed Christians, is not confined to their own dwellings, or to those of their friends; but frequently takes place in the environs and even within the precincts of the house of God! How common it is in many of our congregations for old and young, and professors of religion as well as others, to pass a large portion of the time, during the intermission of divine service, in conversing within and around the meeting-house, on worldly subjects! This is the more lamentable, not only because it is inconsistent with the acknowledged sacredness of the day, and with the reverence which we owe to the majesty of Him in whose house we are, or recently have been, assembled; but because it tends directly and most effectually to prevent our deriving any substantial benefit from the offices of religion on which we are attending. If we spend Sabbath noon in this manner, can it be expected that we shall profit much by the services of the morning? If any good impression was made on our minds by the sermon, or the other exercises, must it not be effaced by the manner of passing the hour, or hours, which immediately follow? And what a poor preparation must this be for the services of the *afternoon!* After conversing an hour or two, perhaps

in a very lively manner, on the affairs of the world, are our minds suitably prepared for hearing the glorious gospel, or for uniting in the songs and supplications of Zion? Would it not be better to pass the intermission in prayer, and praise, and spiritual conversation? Would not the benefit resulting from the Sabbath be far greater than it now, ordinarily, is? Should we not then "love the habitation of" God's "house and the place where his honor dwells"? Would not our souls be refreshed, and be as a watered garden? And would not the preached word be far more beneficial than it is at present? Would it not to the pious part of our assemblies, be "as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as showers upon the grass"? And would it not be "quick and powerful" in the hearts of the ungodly, nay, "sharper than any two-edged sword"? Oh how solemn and delightful would be our worshipping assemblies, if the *whole* Sabbath were devoted to God! And how great the influence which the Sabbath would in that case exert on the general state of religion in the church and in the world! And how evident it must be to every reflecting mind, that our present mode of spending a portion of that holy day, tends, directly, to chill the ardor of piety, and to destroy the spirit and power of godliness among us!

CHAPTER VIII.

Precipitancy in the admission of candidates to Church Fellowship.

There is probably no church of orthodox Christians which does not require of those who solicit her fellowship some account of the work of grace supposed to be wrought in their hearts. But there is much reason to fear that persons are frequently admitted into the purest churches, without that close and thorough examination which ought to be employed. This is true, particularly, in times of great religious excitement. At such seasons it is often difficult to distinguish true religion from its counterfeits. Persons who are not renewed by the grace of God, and who are not even the subjects of very deep convictions, are, not unfrequently, led to think seriously on the great subject of religion, to devote a considerable portion of their time to religious conversation, and religious meetings, and are, indeed, so altered in their whole deportment, that it would seem uncharitable not to entertain a favorable opinion of them. They have, besides, so many opportunities of hearing real Christians relate the gracious exercises of their minds, that they obtain a general

knowledge of Christian experience, and are able, if disposed, to play the hypocrite so adroitly, as to be in no great danger of detection, unless very thoroughly examined. Nay, it seems highly probable that, under these circumstances, such persons often deceive *themselves*, and imagine that the exercises of their minds are of the same character with those which they hear related by real Christians. While reading the Bible, or hearing sermons, exhortations and prayers; perhaps, while trying to pray themselves, they have hopes and fears, joys and sorrows which seem to them exactly similar to those of the real converts with whom they associate. Hence when called upon to relate the feelings of their minds, they without scruple, and without intending to deceive, employ language expressive of real piety. Add to this, that ministers, and Christians generally, are peculiarly apt at such times to be more charitable than they are on ordinary occasions. They feel a very deep interest in the religious state of persons of the above description; they have frequently conversed and prayed with them, and have cherished strong desires and hopes in relation to the result of their religious impressions. It cannot, therefore, be wondered at, that when they profess submission to the Saviour, they should be acknowledged at once as his disciples. The ministers and brethren who have watched the progress of their

convictions with such deep solicitude, and such cheering expectations, can hardly fail of being satisfied with indications of piety in these individuals which fall very much short of decisive evidence of a real and thorough change of heart. The result is that great numbers, especially of youth and children, are admitted into the Church, who in a short time manifest an entire destitution of the spirit and power of true religion.

Does any one ask, what course should be pursued in cases of this kind? The answer is ready, let the minister and other members of the church prevail on themselves to *wait a while*, till their own minds are settled and composed, and till they have opportunity of applying to these supposed converts the test mentioned by our Saviour—"By their *fruits* ye shall know them." This only can determine whether the precious seed has been received into good ground, or whether it has fallen into stony places, or among thorns. The latter, judging from the parable to which we have alluded, may, to all appearance, be as promising as the former. It springs up quickly, and looks green and flourishing. But after a while it is scorched or choked, and shows that no fruit is to be expected from it; or, to use the language of an Old Testament prophet, "the root is rottenness, and the blossom goes up as dust." Alas! how many instances of this kind have occurred, with-

in a few years past! And how have the hopes of many a godly minister been disappointed, and how has his heart been pained, when the goodness of some whom he had fondly embraced as real converts, has proved to be transient like the morning cloud and the early dew! Wait, then, till decisive evidence of piety can be obtained.

Does any one object that the apostles and other members of the primitive Church did *not* wait?—that the 3000 converted on the day of Pentecost were immediately admitted to church fellowship?—that the Ethiopian eunuch was baptized without delay?—that Cornelius and his friends at Cesarea were not required to wait?—and that the Philippian jailer and his family were baptized during the very night in which they were converted? It may be replied, that the danger of deception was then comparatively small—that the Holy Spirit was poured out in very abundant measures—that instances of conversion were peculiarly marked and striking—and that the external circumstances of the church furnished a security against the intrusion of graceless persons which does not at present exist. The consideration last mentioned deserves to be particularly noted. There was but little probability that an individual, under the influence of a worldly spirit, would profess to be a disciple of Christ when his so doing exposed him to the loss of property,

of liberty, and of life. His joining himself to the persecuted band was one of the strongest proofs which could be furnished, or demanded, that Christ had been formed in him the hope of glory. The case is evidently different where a profession of the religion of Christ subjects one to no reproach or inconvenience whatever; nay, causes his temporal prospects to extend and brighten.

But here it may be asked, "what connection has the admission of a few graceless persons into the church, with the low state of religion among us?" In reply, I would remark, that such persons are, at best, *a dead weight* to the church in all her spiritual movements. Destitute, as they are, of spiritual life, their influence tends to chill the ardor of piety in all true Christians with whom they associate, to lull the wise virgins into a profound sleep, and to propagate among them that friendship of the world which is enmity with God. This is true, even though these unconverted persons remain orthodox in their views, and maintain a decent standing in society: a supposition which, in most cases, is highly improbable. As they have no spiritual light, they may be expected to embrace and propagate erroneous views of the gospel, and thereby lay the foundation for those schisms and controversies which dishonor the cause of truth, and destroy what little before existed of the vitality and power of religion

in the church. Nor is this all. Ungodly men who make a profession of religion, are very apt, after a time, to fall into the practice of gross vice. They have no relish for that pure and sublime system of morality taught by our Saviour and his apostles. They may, indeed, sometimes pronounce encomiums upon it; and so did the infidel and licentious Rousseau. But they are attached, firmly attached, to the maxims and customs of the world that lies in wickedness. Hence, in process of time, they are wont to feel the restraints which Christianity imposes, as extremely irksome, and eventually to shake them off, as too injurious to their happiness to be endured. The result is that they become vicious and profligate in their conduct; and by their unholy practices not only dishonor the religion of Christ and grieve the hearts of his true disciples, but accelerate the progress of the unconverted around them in the road to death. A principal reason why there is so little seriousness in persons who make no pretensions to piety is, that many who belong to the church demonstrate by their unholy lives, that the sublime doctrines and precepts of the gospel, have no sanctifying influence upon them. To all this may be added, that the admission of unconverted people into the church, raises an almost insurmountable obstacle in the way of that wholesome discipline which Christ and his apostles instituted, and without which

the purest temple of the living God, must soon resemble a synagogue of Satan. When many of the members of a church are destitute of piety; or when this is true of a small number only, provided they be persons of rank and influence, discipline will either be wholly neglected, or will be administered in such a manner as to be pernicious rather than beneficial. It will be characterized by a supercilious, harsh, bitter, censorious spirit, and by that unchristian partiality which is of itself sufficient to ruin the peace and prosperity of any church.

CHAPTER IX.

Violent Religious Excitements.

That there is a tendency in human nature to indolence and inactivity, after a season of unusual excitement, is a truth universally admitted. This imperfection, for such it unquestionably is, exists in our physical and intellectual constitution, and also in those gracious principles which the Lord has implanted in the hearts of his people by the holy Spirit. These principles, it is true, need to be excited;

and when the excitement is not too violent, its tendency is to increase their strength. But when, as sometimes happens, the strength of these principles is much inferior to that of the stimulating powers which are brought to bear upon them, they are overwrought, and lose the healthful and vigorous tone which they naturally possess. They resemble a bow which is overstrained, or the human body when greatly fatigued, by too severe and long-continued exercise. And while gracious principles are thus weakened, the principles of sin existing in the heart are wont, in consequence of the temporary restraint put upon them, to become more powerful and impetuous. They resemble the current of a brook increased to a torrent by obstructions thrown in its way. The truth of these remarks has been clearly demonstrated, within a few years past, by numerous facts in relation both to individuals and to churches.*

* The practice of holding protracted meetings, has, of late years, become very common in our country. In some instances, these meetings have been continued for several weeks in succession with no intervals, except those indispensable for taking sustenance and sleep. Meanwhile, every effort has been made by preachers of distinguished talents and zeal, to excite the attention of both saints and sinners to the momentous subject of religion. The eternal joys of heaven, and the eternal miseries of hell, have been described in the most graphic manner, and with all the pa-

CHAPTER X.

Prevalence of the opinion that the influence of religious principle cannot be expected, in most cases, to be steady and constant.

Religion, with a large portion of professed Christians, is in a great measure confined to places of worship, or to seasons of revival. While attending on the preaching of the gospel, and uniting in the

thos of sacred eloquence. The saint has been made to feel the greatness of his own guilt, in neglecting to labor for the salvation of sinners, while the latter have been so assailed with prayers and exhortations and warnings from every quarter, that an unnatural effervescence of their passions has been produced, and has left them scarce any possibility of obtaining those clear, distinct, and scriptural views of the perfections of God, and of their own guilt as transgressors of his law, so essential to all those religious impressions which are likely to be permanent and saving. It is, of course, not strange that after such a season of excitement, the minds of both saints and sinners should pass into the opposite extreme, and should, for a time, be as much characterized by apathy, as they previously were by zeal and fervor.

"Are protracted meetings, then, to be denounced as prejudicial to the cause of piety?" By no means. When rightly conducted, they have done good; and, when thus conducted, they are likely to do good hereafter. The writer has attended several of these meetings, which received his decided approbation. But they were

songs and supplications of Zion, they feel condemned if their affections are not excited, and if emotions which at least resemble those of piety, are not produced. But when engaged in their secular affairs, they feel but little concern to have their hearts replenished with the fear and love of God, or their minds occupied with the contemplation of the great truths of religion. Their thoughts are generally engrossed with secular business—with schemes for amassing wealth, or attaining to posts of honor,—

characterized by a *solemn stillness*, on the part of the audience, and by a steady effort on that of officiating ministers to make sinners realize the equity of God's moral government, the entire reasonableness of his requirements, and the baseness and criminality involved in the transgression of his laws. These points, together with the great love of God in sending his Son to suffer and die for sinners, were prominent topics of discourse, and were exhibited in a manner adapted to enlist the understanding, the conscience, and the heart, on the side of God and holiness. There was at these meetings a deep interest manifested in religious exercises. The sermons, though some of them were read, were listened to with that profound attention, which indicated an earnest desire to hear and obey the truth; and each individual present seemed to feel that eternity with all its dread realities was at the door. But there were no convulsive agonies, no interruptions of divine worship by the exclamations of the distressed, and no violent ebullition of the passions in any form. The convictions of the understanding evidently took the lead, and the religious feelings which followed seemed nothing more than the necessary results of divine truth applied to the conscience and the heart by the Spirit of God.

or with contrivances for procuring those earthly pleasures which though generally considered as innocent and creditable, have no tendency to raise the soul to God, or prepare it for the great duties of the Christian life. If you introduce the subject of religion to persons of this description, they do not, perhaps, refuse to converse upon it; especially, if you manifest a willingness to discourse in a speculative way. But if you press on their attention the importance of a holy life—of a daily and hourly consecration of the heart to God, of having a regard to his glory in all they do, of living as strangers and pilgrims on the earth, and of directing all their aims and exertions to things beyond the grave—they are usually silent, or barely assent to the truth of what you say. They manifest no disposition to prolong discourse of this kind. It is a strain of conversation in which they feel no interest. But the moment you introduce some worldly subject, they are sufficiently ready to perform their part in the discussion of it. They now speak with interest and earnestness, as from the fulness of their hearts, and seem never tired while topics of this kind are the subjects of discourse. In this manner they pass along from month to month, and from year to year, thinking and speaking almost exclusively of earthly things; except when the stated seasons of public

worship call up their attention to subjects of a different kind. And they do not seem to realize that the predominance of this worldly spirit is, in any considerable degree, offensive to God, or prejudicial to themselves. At any rate, they do not appear to entertain any just conception of the great blemish which the habitual indulgence of such a spirit fixes on their Christian character, or the immense injury done to their own souls by suffering the world to engross so large a portion of their time and thoughts.

Persons, however, of the above description are not satisfied with being *always* in this condition. They imagine that a real Christian must sometimes live in a manner more spiritual and more devoted to God. He must, they suppose, have his seasons of revival, in which for days, and weeks, and months, religion is uppermost in his thoughts, and in which he is almost exclusively employed, either in devotional exercises, or in conversation on divine subjects. And such seasons these persons actually have. Once in ten or twelve years, perhaps oftener, a revival is enjoyed in the place where they reside. Religious meetings are frequent and well attended. The spirit of piety which had long slumbered, seems to awake, and the church hears the voice of her God and Saviour, saying, " Arise, shine ; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee ;" and many who were previously dead in trespasses

and sins, are blessed with spiritual life, and begin to sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. At such a time the professors of religion whose characters we are delineating, are generally aroused, confess that they have been long in a cold, backslidden state, and express a determination to shake off their guilty slumbers, and live more devoted to Christ than they have hitherto done. They accordingly attend religious meetings almost every day in the week; and when at meeting, seem full of pious fervor; they pray and exhort in a very earnest manner; and seem determined to make amends for the many years of sloth and negligence which had previously passed over them. At these seasons, besides, their *conversation* is generally on religious subjects; and if they meet with any professor of religion who is not as warm and lively as themselves, they are almost ready to blot him out of their list of pious people, and can hardly think that he ever knew the grace of God in truth. In this manner they proceed till the revival begins to abate, and the external excitements to devotion and fervor are somewhat diminished, when they rapidly decline, and soon return to the state from which they emerged when the revival commenced. In a few months, perhaps in a few weeks, they are as much engrossed with the world, as neglectful of religious meetings, and, to all appearance as destitute of the spirit of religion, as they

ever were. And so they continue some ten or twelve years, till another revival overtakes them, when they are again aroused, again confess their faults, and, indeed, act over almost exactly the same part which they acted ten or twelve years before. And such changes, they seem to imagine, are things *of course*. They can hardly conceive the possibility of a constant and steady walk with God. And though they condemn themselves as somewhat blameable, for their backslidings, they seem to suppose that there is a kind of *fatality* in the case; that a steady and uniform course of piety is not to be expected; and that the genuineness of their religion, and the safety of their state ought not to be called in question, on account of these blemishes in their christian character.

In making these remarks, the writer is anxious that he may not be misunderstood. He does not mean to say, that the above picture will suit every professor of religion in our country. No; he believes there are thousands of different denominations who maintain from year to year a close and humble walk with God—thousands who are not merely constant in the external performance of moral and religions duties, but manifest a strong attachment to the cause of truth, and an unwavering determination to be for Christ and for none else. Yes, he believes that there are thousands in this land,

who feel that religion ought to be the main business of every day, and who steadily endeavor to live to the glory of God, in seasons of declension, as well as in seasons of revival. But, unless he is greatly mistaken, the picture above drawn will suit a very large portion of the Christian community. Their religion *begins and ends*, in a great measure, with the revivals which take place around them. When there is no special attention paid to the things of God in the place where they reside, they very much resemble the men of the world, both in spirit and conduct. They can hardly be said to maintain the *form* of godliness; and as to its *power*, scarce any thing of this can be seen in them for years in succession. Indeed, if these persons are Christians, (and it is believed that some of them are,) they can hardly be distinguished, a large portion of the time, from many who are dead in trespasses and sins. And, as already intimated, they seem to imagine that *it must be so;* that a constant, steady, uniform walk with God, is not to be expended in the great body of professed Christians. Now this is evidently a mistake, and a mistake of most pernicious influence. It tends much to diminish the efforts which Christians are bound to make for preserving and increasing in their own hearts, and in the hearts of their brethren, the spirit of piety, and for preventing those long-continued spiritual decays, so injurious to them-

selves and the cause of Christ. As long as they imagine it is impossible, or nearly so, for a Christian to be uniformly devoted to God, they are very likely to yield to the current of worldly influence which sets against them, and, of course, to do but little for promoting their own salvation, or that of others.

CHAPTER XI.

Perversion of the Doctrine of Grace.

The doctrine which asserts that the salvation of a sinner is altogether of the grace of God, is a most glorious truth—a truth which lies at the foundation of the Christian scheme, and which, if rightly understood, is admirably adapted, not only to afford consolation to the renewed heart, but to subdue the power of sin, and make men holy in all manner of conversation. But this great and precious doctrine, like every other good thing, is liable to be abused; and it *is* abused by multitudes of professed Christians at the present day; nay, by many who, in a judgment of charity, are Christians in deed and in

truth. They seem to draw from the doctrine the conclusion that it is unnecessary for them to make any vigorous efforts for their own salvation or that of others. Feeling assured that, wherever God begins a good work, he will carry it on, and that he is working in them both to will and to do of his own good pleasure, they seem not to realize the necessity imposed on them of working out their own salvation with fear and trembling. They appear to entertain the idea, that, if they do any thing more than look on, and admire and adore the grace of God, a *part* of the glory of their salvation must be due to themselves, and, consequently, that the *whole* glory will not be due to God. But such views are not authorized by the Bible, or by the analogy of nature. In the Bible we meet with many exhortations to vigorous and persevering efforts for advancing the influence of piety in our souls. We find this holy book urging Christians to "mortify their members which are on the earth"—to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts"—to "put off the old man which is corrupt, and to put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Nay, it exhorts us to "cleanse ourselves from *all* filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." It represents the Christian life as a pilgrimage, a race, a warfare; all of which similitudes convey the idea that it is not a life

of idleness and ease, but of laborious exertion; and it promises eternal life on no other condition than that of being "faithful unto death," and overcoming the numerous and formidable obstacles which lie in our way. It teaches us the same great truth by exhibiting the example of eminent saints. Thus it represents Paul as saying, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do; forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." St. Paul felt that he must exert himself to the utmost, if he would obtain the blessedness of heaven. And he does not seem to have even surmised, that there was any inconsistency between the necessity of his own exertions in this great affair, and the doctrine that "eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ."

And these views derived from the infallible word of God, are in perfect accordance with the *analogy of nature*. It is a certain truth that the temporal blessings which we enjoy all come from the hand of God, and are to be acknowledged as the fruits of his bounty. The husbandman is indebted to God for the soil he cultivates, for the manure by which it is enriched, for the genial influences of the sun, and for the fructifying showers of rain with which he is ordinarily blessed. He is indebted to God,

too, for all the skill and strength which he possesses, and for the disposition he has to labor for his own subsistence. His being provided, therefore, with the necessaries and comforts of life, ought to be ascribed to the goodness of God. Still, what husbandman supposes it is of no importance for him to cultivate his farm? He does not say, "It is all of God, and therefore I will do nothing." No; as soon as the Spring opens, he repairs his fences, ploughs and manures his grounds, and sows his seed. Nor does he on any other condition expect a crop. He knows that he must sow in tears, if he would reap in joy. And when he pursues this course, he usually obtains the object of his wishes. The summer is fruitful, and the harvest plenteous. Now, the same holds in regard to our spiritual concerns. Our salvation is all of God's grace. This is a truth most cheerfully admitted. But it is a truth equally plain and certain, that the grace of God does not supersede the necessity of human efforts. The soul of each Christian may be called his *garden*. This garden must be ploughed. The fallow ground must be broken up, and good seed, even the word of God must be sown in it. And when the seed springs up and grows, care must be taken to prevent the noxious weeds of error and sin from raising their heads, and choking the plants of righteousness which are growing there. Now what man thinks

of leaving it to God to pull up the weeds in his garden, or to cultivate the valuable plants whioh are growing in it? He expects rain and sun-shine from God, and the strength and skill which he needs in the management of his business. But he never thinks of excusing himself from his rustic labors, from a persuasion that God either can, or will, do all without him. And if he did, you know what the consequence must be. His lands, untilled and neglected, would resemble those described by Solomon. "I went," says he, "by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding. And lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down." So it is with the heart of many a professor of religion. It but too much resembles the field of the slothful. The thorns and nettles of unholy affections and imaginations are growing in rank luxuriance. And if you look for the plants of righteousness, you look almost in vain. Here and there, perhaps, may be seen a single stalk of precious grain, slender, and of sickly appearance, and almost choked by the thorns and nettles which are spreading themselves around it. At the same time that holy watchfulness which, like a hedge or wall, once defended the heart against the intrusion of every enemy, can hardly be said to exist. Nor does there seem to be any thing to prevent the Christian's

foes from entering and treading down this garden of the Lord. If they do not, it is owing to the special interposition of his mercy and power. And let it not be forgotten that this deplorable state of the Christian's heart is owing, in a great measure, to a perversion of the doctrine of grace. It must be owing to a *perversion* of that glorious doctrine. The rich and sovereign grace revealed in the gospel was doubtless intended, not to supersede, but to aid and strengthen our efforts in the cause of truth. I will not indeed say, that if it had this effect on the Christian professor, his heart would be *always* in an equally good state. There might possibly, *even then*, be seasons of spiritual drought—seasons just long enough to make him feel that all his sufficiency was of God. But his heart would still be well replenished with the seeds of truth and the plants of righteousness. The noxious weeds of error and sin would be rooted out, as fast as they showed themselves; and the heart would resemble a well fenced and well cultivated garden which needed nothing but a plentiful shower and the benign influences of the sun to render it all which its owner could desire. It is hardly necessary to add, that what has been said of individual Christians, is true of churches. One great reason why they are, frequently, in such a feeble, barren, disordered state, is, that they have perverted the doctrine of grace by a slothful neglect

of the means which God has appointed for promoting their order, strength, and fruitfulness.

CHAPTER XII.

The manner in which Christian Ministers often spend their time when out of the Pulpit.

It is not intended at present to animadvert on the worst cases of the kind alluded to at the head of this chapter. No remarks will be made on instances in which a preacher has been chargeable with frivolity, and dissipation, and gross vice; nor in which, without necessity, he has devoted nearly all his time, except on the Sabbath, to secular business; nor to instances in which he has entered so deeply into political discussions, as to leave him neither leisure nor inclination for the duties of his profession. Nor, finally, will any thing be said, particularly, in relation to instances in which several clergymen have formed a kind of spiritual junto, or aristocracy, for the purpose of raising themselves above their brethren, and securing for their own benefit, or that of their friends, the most honorable and lucrative of those places to which the ministers of Christ are permit-

ted to aspire. In all cases of this kind, it must be obvious to the dullest understanding, that the preacher's heart is not in his work, and that, of course, he cannot be expected to prosper in it. No; the Christian minister is supposed to be chargeable with none of these things. He is supposed to pay very little attention to secular pursuits of any kind, and to be a modest, retiring, unostentatious man, who is willing to occupy a low place among his brethren. It is admitted, besides, that he devotes a suitable portion of his time to pastoral visits; that in visiting his people, he maintains a serious, dignified deportment; and that his intercourse with them is uniformly characterized by kindness of feeling and suavity of manners. Nay, more; it is admitted that he converses principally on moral and religious subjects, and that his discourse is uncommonly instructive and interesting. Still, there may be a lamentable defect in his manner of conducting pastoral visits. His conversation, after all, may have little or no tendency to promote the vitality and power of religion among the members of his church, or to arouse his unconverted hearers to a serious and earnest attention to their immortal interests; nay, it may have a *contrary* tendency.

Let us suppose that, in conversing with the members of his church, he seldom urges with becoming solemnity and earnestness the importance of a holy

life, of setting the affections on things above, of living as strangers and pilgrims on the earth, and of a daily consecration of the heart to God; that he seldom endeavors to impress on their minds the obligation they are under to hold all they have as sacredly devoted to the cause of Christ; that he seldom questions them closely on the state of their souls, or reproves them in a tender and solemn manner when they go astray; that he says but little respecting the love of God, the preciousness of Christ, or the glory of heaven; but spends his visits principally in detailing the statistics of protracted meetings and revivals at home, or of missionary operations abroad; or in giving an account of the meetings of the various benevolent societies with which he is acquainted,—the efforts made, the agents employed, the opposition encountered, and the sums raised by these associations. . . . . There may be nothing positively wrong in his manner of conducting pastoral visits. Nay, the various topics on which he discourses may very properly be introduced; they are all interesting and important, and ought to occupy a portion of every preacher's time, when he is conversing with his people. But his *dwelling* on them to the almost entire exclusion of other, and still more important topics, is an evil which can hardly fail of rendering his labors in private, on the whole, useless, if not positively injuri-

ous. Such visits are not adapted to inspire his brethren with ardent aspirations after eminence in holiness; but rather to make them satisfied with a life of religious dissipation, in which the hurry, and bustle, and parade of meetings, speeches, and collections are substituted for that daily and hourly intercourse of the soul with its God, in which the life and power of real piety so much consists.*

In his private intercourse with the unconverted part of his congregation, let us suppose, that, though he is grave and serious, he manifests no deep sense of their lost and perishing condition, their exposure to the just displeasure of God, and their danger every moment of sinking into endless misery; that, instead of this, his deportment and conversation na-

* The writer hopes his Christian brethren will not misunderstand him. He assures them that he is no enemy to the pious and benevolent operations of the day. He rejoices that so much is done and likely to be done, for sending the gospel to the heathen, for disseminating the Scriptures and well written Tracts, and for assisting in their preparatory studies such pious but indigent young men as God has called to the ministry of his word. He rejoices, too, in the efforts made in the cause of temperance and of moral reform; nay, in the whole system of measures adapted to meliorate the condition of the human race. What he objects to is the disproportionate regard which, in many instances, is paid to these objects—a regard which leaves scarce any time for secret prayer, for searching the heart, for studying the Bible, or for conversation with either saints or sinners on those momentous subjects with which the salvation of the soul is so intimately connected.

turally lead them to suppose, that he considers them in a pardoned and justified state; or, if not, that, in his opinion, there is no necessity for any deep concern, or any vigorous efforts on their part to obtain an interest in Christ. Is it difficult to determine what must be the natural tendency of his visits? Can they fail to operate as *sedatives* to any feelings of concern and anxiety which may have been previously excited? And yet, alas! how many such visits have been made by thousands of clergymen of the most respectable standing! How common it is for a preacher to converse with sinners in a *general way*, without even a serious endeavor to bring such truths as are specially suited to their case to bear upon the conscience and the heart! In our pastoral visits, we ought, if possible, to *clench* the nail which we had driven in our public discourses; instead of which, how often do we *loosen* it; nay, draw it quite out of the sinner's heart! Oh how important it is that the Christian pastor adopt a different course without delay! How important that while making his parochial visits, he feel such a sense of the worth of souls, and such a deep concern for the conversion of his impenitent hearers, as shall constrain him to address them in the most serious, affectionate, and impressive manner; and to follow the practice from week to week, and from month to month! It is not, indeed, asserted, that the pastor of a church

should never converse with his unconverted hearers on any but religious subjects. Other subjects may, and must be frequently introduced. But unless the design of their introduction be the transaction of necessary wordly business, the discussion of them should invariably be so managed, as to prepare the way for subjects which have an immediate connection with the soul, and its immortal interests. If any Christian reader should think the course here recommended too strict and puritanical, it seems sufficient to remark, that such was evidently the course pursued by our Saviour and his apostles; nay, that such *is* the course pursued *at present* by all the true ministers of Christ in seasons of revival.

CHAPTER XIII.

Prevalence of the opinion that on the pastor of a church is devolved the whole work of promoting the interests of religion in the place where he resides.

Some religious people have imagined that the lay members of a church were authorized and required to perform nearly all the duties of a pastor; and, of course, that the latter, except, perhaps, in the ad-

ministration of special ordinances, had little more to do than the other members of his church. This is, undoubtedly, a great mistake, and productive, wherever it prevails, of great mischief to the church of Christ. The pastor should, unquestionably, hold a very prominent place among his brethren. He has in a most emphatic sense the supervision of the branch of Zion with which he is connected. It is his duty, especially, to preach "the glorious gospel of the blessed God," to divide aright the word of truth, and to watch for souls as one who must give account. Indeed, the charge committed to him is one of the most sacred and awful which can be conceived, and requires that, in ordinary cases, his whole time and strength be devoted to it. It follows, of course, that a want of faithfulness on his part is peculiarly criminal, and must, unless he repent, expose him to the most fearful tokens of the divine displeasure. Still, a great deal ought to be done by the members of his church and congregation towards promoting the interests of religion among them. They are bound in the first place—unless their poverty absolutely forbids—to give him such a temporal support as shall enable him, not indeed to accumulate a fortune, or to live in luxury and splendor, but to procure for himself and those dependent on him, the necessaries and comforts of life; and, without paying much attention to worldly

business, to make some decent provision for the exigencies of sickness and old age. A neglect on the part of his church to do this, is a great evil, as it must prevent his enriching his mind with spiritual knowledge, and preparing himself in a suitable manner for the services of the sanctuary. He cannot, therefore, supply the golden candlestick with *beaten oil*, or come to his people in the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ, or commend himself to their approbation as a scribe well instructed in the kingdom of God, who, like a faithful householder, brings forth out of his treasures things new and old. And can it be wondered at, if the members of such a church do not grow in grace, or in spiritual knowledge? The necessity which they impose on their pastor of devoting himself to secular business, renders his sermons comparatively poor, destitute of that variety, and of those soul-enriching exhibitions of divine truth which ought to characterize the preaching of a Christian pastor. Nor can it be expected that, after being immersed in the business of the world from Monday morning till Saturday night, the tone of his mind will be as spiritual and devout as it would have been had he been employed, during the week, in studying his Bible and discharging the other duties of his sacred calling. It cannot be expected that, either in preaching or praying, he will manifest that spirituality,

solemnity, and fervor, so important to the minister of Christ, and so admirably adapted to promote the power of godliness among his people. Nor is this all. If the neglect of his people to supply his temporal wants, subjects him to the necessity of devoting most of his time to secular business, he cannot have much leisure for parochial visits, which, if rightly conducted, contribute greatly to a pastor's usefulness. While, therefore, his people, by withholding from him a temporal support, render his pastoral visits few, they are taking a course which tends directly to impoverish their own souls, and spread darkness, and disunion, and spiritual barrenness over the heritage of God.

But there is more to be said on this subject. Withholding a temporal support from their pastor, is not the only particular in which the members of a church may fail of doing their duty. There ought to be on their part a general, constant, and vigorous *co-operation* with their pastor in his efforts to promote the interests of religion among them. While he, by his preaching and pastoral visits, is assiduously laboring for the good of their souls, it is very important that they assist him in these labors of love by a punctual attendance on religious meetings, by taking an active part in such meetings on proper occasions, by conversing much one with

another on divine subjects, by taking and reading those periodicals which are adapted to promote the spirit and power of true religion among them, by encouraging the Sunday School and the Bible Class, by contributing according to their ability in aid of the pious and benevolent operations of the day, by leading holy and blameless lives, by conversing with the unconverted of their respective families and neighborhoods, in a tender and serious manner on the state of their souls, by rallying round their pastor and sustaining him against the rude attacks which he sometimes experiences from the enemies of the cross, and by daily offering up to God in his behalf that effectual fervent prayer which availeth much. By doing these things, they would not only encourage his heart and strengthen his hands in the great work to which he is devoted, and thereby enable *him* to do more, much more, than he otherwise could, but would do much *directly themselves* toward sustaining and advancing the cause of religion among them. Those very exercises in which we have supposed them to be engaged would contribute much to foster the spirit and power of godliness in their own hearts. While thus co-operating with their pastor in doing good, their souls would be as a watered garden; the graces of the Holy Spirit implanted in them, would be in a vigor-

ous and healthful state, and the spirit of union and Christian love would be diffused through the whole church. Nor is it difficult to perceive what must be the effect of these things on such members of the congregation as are out of Christ. The church, occupying such high and holy ground, must in connection with her pastor, exert a mighty and a most salutary influence on the unconverted. The latter could hardly slumber securely in sin while assailed from every quarter by such powerful excitements to diligence and ardor in seeking the salvation of their souls. No, a principal reason why the *unconverted* are so easy, is that *we who profess religion* are so easy. Did we constantly manifest a deep sense of their guilt and danger, and an earnest solicitude for their salvation, they would soon be aroused; and, with the 3000 convicted on the day of Pentecost, would say "Men and brethren what must we do?" Were the members of the church thus spiritual and faithful, the preached gospel would not be that inefficient, powerless thing which it now too often proves. The great truths of the Bible, exhibited by the faithful minister, would approve themselves to the consciences of his hearers generally, and would "be mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds." Sinners would be awakened, and converts multiplied; and the

church would "look forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

CHAPTER XIV.

Manner in which Christians frequently treat the Holy Spirit.

It is the exhortation of an inspired apostle, "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, by which ye are sealed to the day of redemption." If any inquire, how we may grieve the Holy Spirit; the answer is, that we do so by ungratefully disregarding either his past favors, or the present intimations he gives of his willingness to come and bless us.

In regard to the past favors bestowed upon us by the Holy Spirit, we may well say that in number, variety, and value, they exceed all calculation, and have laid us under obligations which eternity only can discharge. It was this heavenly Agent who, from love to our souls, so often visited us in our unconverted state, and urged upon our consciences the baseness and the guilt of rebelling against God; who told us of the danger to which that rebellion

exposed us, and warned us to flee without delay to the gospel Refuge. It was the same blessed Agent who, after being long resisted and abused, at last convinced us of our guilt and ruin, and by the omnipotence of his grace subdued the enmity of our hearts, humbled us in the dust, and made us the joyful partakers of pardon, and all the rich blessings of the everlasting covenant. Yes, it was the Holy Spirit who took us out of the horrible pit and miry clay of an unregenerate state, and set our feet on the Rock of ages, established our goings in the highway of holiness, and put a new song into our mouths, even praise unto our God. It was He that revealed Christ in us the hope of glory. It was He that made us members of the royal family of heaven, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ to an inheritance which is incorruptible, and undefiled, and fadeth not away. It was the same Spirit who led us by the hand during the period of our spiritual infancy, that gradually opened to us the mind and will of God, as revealed in his word, that so often applied the truth with light and comfort to our hearts, and thus sealed us to the day of redemption. It was the same heavenly Agent who so frequently brought us back when we had strayed from the spiritual fold; who healed our wounds, assuaged our griefs, allayed our fears, indited our petitions, helped our infirmities,

and made intercession for us according to the will of God. It was He, too, who in the time of great outward troubles,—the loss of property, of health, or of endeared friends—stood by us and sustained us. When we were ready to sink, this blessed Comforter whispered in our ear, "As thy day is thy strength shall be. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee. When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." Nay, such was the support and consolation which his presence and grace afforded, that each of us was constrained to say, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Indeed, the favors bestowed upon us by the Holy Spirit demand the liveliest emotions of gratitude, and can never be adequately repaid or acknowledged in this world or the next. And how have we requited this heavenly Benefactor? How vastly disproportionate our gratitude to the innumerable and immensely rich blessings which he has bestowed upon us! How little have we felt our obligations to him for all the grace and consolation which we have received, and for all the well-founded hopes of heaven which we have been permitted to cherish! And can we wonder that, aggrieved by our

ingratitude, he has for a season withdrawn himself from us, and left us in a measure destitute of the blessings which we had so strangely abused?

There is one way in which this ingratitude has been manifested that deserves to be particularly mentioned. We have too often arrogated to ourselves a part of the glory which was due exclusively to the Spirit of God. He has, suppose, blessed us with a revival of his gracious work among us. Our own souls, which for a season were like the heath in the wilderness, have become like the garden of the Lord; while many around us, who were dead in trespasses and sins, have been quickened by his saving power, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. The preached word was, for a time, quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and became a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. When the servant of the Lord prophesied over the dry bones, there was a noise and a shaking; and the bones came together, bone to its bone; and lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above. And when he prophesied again, the breath of heavenly life came into them, and caused them to stand up on their feet an embattled host, prepared to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

Such a season of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, was most evidently *his* work; and, while enjoying it, we were bound to lie in the dust before him, and to ascribe the glory, the *whole* glory, to his most holy name. This, perhaps, we frequently acknowledged, both in private and in public. We called the work, we were permitted to witness, the work of God. We admitted the agency of his blessed spirit in the whole matter. But still we claimed a part of the glory for ourselves and for certain individuals of our fellow men. Before the work commenced, and during its progress, we did much to promote it. We held numerous prayer meetings; we appointed committees to visit from house to house, and converse faithfully with saints and sinners. We endeavored, besides, as *individuals*, to excite an attention to religion in all around us. We conversed in a serious manner with each person to whom we could have access, and labored to make an impression on every mind in favor of Christ and his cause. Our minister was remarkably faithful and laborious, and did much to promote the revival. He chose the most appropriate subjects, and discussed them in the most instructive and impressive manner. He laid open the sinner's case so plainly, that it seemed impossible for any, however stupid and hardened, to fail of realizing their lost condition. Neighboring ministers came in to his

assistance, and by their excellent sermons and exhortations, did much to help forward the good work. One individual was awakened by *this* sermon, and another by *that;* while by a *third*, several were brought to rejoice in the truth. And while thinking and speaking of the work in this manner, have we not felt, and has not our language sometimes implied, that almost as much was to be attributed to the agency of man, as to that of the Holy Spirit? For some years past, the churches, generally, have evidently been in great danger of cherishing feelings and uttering expressions of this kind. The subject of human agency has been much discussed, and many excellent things have been said upon it. The antinomian heresy has been thoroughly exposed, and the importance of a proper use of the appointed means of grace, has been placed in a clear and strong light. Christians now feel the necessity of human efforts in relation to the salvation of the soul, and to the cause of Christ, as much as in relation to their secular pursuits. And, thus far, all is right. But experience and observation teach us how difficult it is to preserve, in regard to any two extremes, the proper medium. There are not a few who, in their zeal to shun the errors of the antinomian and the fatalist, seem to have gone into the opposite extreme, and to have attributed more to human agency than they ought; in

doing which they have withheld from the Holy Spirit the glory due to his name. They have seemed to imagine that a revival might be produced at any time by the use of proper means,—that, for instance, a series of religious meetings well sustained by ministers and people, could hardly fail of awakening slumbering sinners, and bringing many of them to the saving knowledge of Christ. Under these circumstances, can we wonder if the Spirit of the Lord has been grieved; and, leaving ministers and people to try their own strength, has taught them by the entire failure of their efforts, that, whatever means or instruments may be employed, the excellency of the power is of God and not of them? And is not this one reason why, in so many instances, protracted meetings have been held without success?

There is, as already intimated, another way in which we may have grieved the Holy Spirit, namely, by ungratefully disregarding the present intimations of his willingness to come and bless us. Since the commencement of that spiritual apathy which now so generally prevails, there have, probably, been seasons in which a degree of quickening has been felt by the members of the church, and in which sinners have paid more than usual attention to the means of grace. During two or three weeks, suppose, religious meetings have been more numerously

attended, and the preached gospel has been listened to with more seriousness, and the truth has seemed to fall on the assembly with greater weight than on ordinary occasions. At such times the Holy Spirit is giving us intimations of his willingness to come and bless us with abundant showers of grace. And there seems no reason to doubt but that he would actually do this, did we not by our coldness and indifference, show that we were not prepared to appreciate the blessing which he was about to confer. Suppose a friend should call on us in the morning, and with the utmost kindness and delicacy, should intimate his willingness to pass the day with us. And suppose, that, instead of bidding him a cordial welcome, we should treat him with neglect, and give him the strongest reason to conclude that we did not desire his company. Would he not be grieved? And would he be likely to visit us again very soon? — Can we wonder, then, that the spirit of the Lord, when treated in a similar manner by those who are infinitely indebted to him, should withdraw from them, and leave them destitute of the sensible tokens of his love, till they realize their guilt and folly, and manifest an earnest desire to regain the rich blessing which they now so strangely despise? *

* See the Rev. Dr. Hall's Treatise on the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER XV.

Neglect of the daily exercise of Repentance towards God, and of Faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.

It will be generally admitted that unconverted men must repent of sin and believe in Jesus Christ, before they can enjoy true peace, or lead a holy life. It will also be admitted that, when a saint has been chargeable with any remarkable deviation from the right path, a new exercise of repentance and faith is necessary for him; as in the case of David when he had sinned in the affair of Uriah; and of Peter, when he had denied his Lord and Master. But we do not seem to realize that the like necessity exists, daily, in regard to all the members of the Redeemer's spiritual family. We are apt to suppose that when a Christian leads what we consider an exemplary, pious life, he may go on prosperously, for weeks and months, without any special exercise of faith or repentance. This might, and probably would, be true of us, if we had attained to sinless perfection. Were we sure that we did nothing offensive to God—that the feelings of our hearts were all in perfect conformity with the divine requirements—we might pass days and weeks, perhaps months and years, without any new exercise

of godly sorrow, or any new application to Christ as the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. But such is not our case. We daily sin, and come short of the glory of God. It is seldom we pass a day, without *saying* or *doing* something which a tender and enlightened conscience is constrained to condemn. And as to our *thoughts* and *feelings*, how many times, in a single day, if not in a single hour, are they different from what they ought to be! How much selfishness, and pride, and vain-glory are felt! How much inordinate love to the world! How much unwillingness to deny ourselves and bear the cross! Or if we are conscious of nothing *positively wrong*, how great a *want of intensity and fervor* is there in our spiritual feelings! How far does our love to God, to his word and to his cause, fall below that high and perfect standard by which we are required to try ourselves! And how often do we suffer our thoughts to wander from spiritual subjects, when we might control them, and when, without any prejudice to our worldly business, they might be occupied with the great and precious truths of the gospel. Indeed, it is evident that the best Christian in the world who properly watches the movements of his own mind, even when his outward conduct is entirely fair, will find enough every day to fill him with shame and confusion before God, and

to render him incapable of joy, or peace, till with unfeigned sorrow he has made confession at the mercy seat, and has gone by faith to that blessed fountain which cleanses from all iniquity. A neglect to do this seems to be a principal reason why Christians in general live so little as they ought to do, and enjoy so little of the comforts of religion. Sin defiles the conscience; and, when the conscience is defiled, all our spiritual energies are enfeebled; we gradually become spiritually diseased, and are disqualified alike for running the race which is set before us, and for partaking of those rich consolations which the Lord has prepared for his people. To change the figure, sin *wounds* the soul; and unless we daily repent and go to Christ by faith, our wounds are not healed. They, of course, increase in number and virulence daily; till, in process of time, the soul resembles the body when covered with bruises and putrifying sores. Now this is really the case at present with a multitude of professed Christians, and with many churches. Should we strip off the garment of external decency which covers them, we should find, alas! but little besides a mass of moral putrescence. Oh how important it is that individual Christians, and churches realize this lamentable truth, and repair without delay to the great Physician, and to the fountain which he has opened—a fountain whose living waters are

adapted alike to cleanse the polluted soul, and heal its spiritual maladies! Were this done daily, Christians would not so often resemble those who are dead in trespasses and sins. No; the members of the church would exhibit the appearance of moral and spiritual health; and, instead of that languor and feebleness which now too often characterize them, would be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might; and their achievements in the spiritual warfare would be truly glorious.

CLOSING ADDRESS.

To real Christians of every Denomination.

Beloved Brethren,

The writer has now done what he had principally in view in this essay—has taken a brief survey of the evil in question, and pointed out what he considers some of the principal causes to which it should be ascribed. He does not by any means pretend to have exhausted the subject. He is sensible that *other* causes might justly be assigned. But he wishes to avoid unnecessary prolixity; and, unless he greatly mistake, the causes which

have been named are the most prominent; and will, if properly weighed, lead to the contemplation of those which, for brevity's sake, have been omitted. The subject, you will all admit, is one of vast importance—a subject in the right understanding of which the glory of God, the prosperity of his spiritual kingdom, and the best interests of the soul are deeply involved. He trusts, therefore, that what he has said will receive your candid and prayerful attention, and will be the means of inciting us all to avoid in future the errors in our spiritual course from which so much evil has resulted. Do you ask, "By what means may we obtain deliverance from the unhappy state into which we have fallen?" You will find an answer in the last chapter of this essay. It was there stated that the neglect of the daily exercise of repentance towards God, and of faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, was one cause of the evil in question. It is proper now to add, that we cannot rise out of this low condition without repenting of our sins in dust and ashes, and going anew to Christ in the exercise of a true and lively faith. Till this is done, we cannot attain that elevated standing as individuals, or as churches, which we ought to occupy; nor can we walk in the light of the Lord, or enjoy the satisfaction of seeing the unconverted around us become the friends and followers of Jesus Christ. And shall we not, breth-

ren, immediately betake ourselves, in a humble dependence on the grace of God, to the performance of this necessary and most important work? Shall we live any longer at this poor dying rate?—dishonoring the name of our God and Saviour, depriving our own souls of all real comfort, and confirming the ungodly in their opposition to Christ and the way of holiness? Alas! brethren, shall we remain another year in this sad condition? Shall we remain another month, or another day? Behold, our God is rich in mercy, and is waiting to receive us, wretched prodigals; to purify us from all our pollutions, to clothe us with the garments of salvation, and to admit us, unworthy and guilty as we are, to the richest entertainments of his house. And shall we refuse to avail ourselves of his grace and bounty? Shall we choose to remain in the "far country," where dearth, and famine, and degradation, and death abound? Shall we perish with hunger, rather than return to our Father's house where is bread enough and to spare? Oh let us obey that voice which speaks to us from the heights of Zion, and says, "Return ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." Let us bless the name of that gracious Being with whom there is forgiveness, that he may be feared; and let us unite in saying to him, "Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God." This done, we shall regain the consolations of his grace, shall teach

transgressors his ways, and see them flying to him as clouds and as doves to their windows. Nor shall we long be destitute of the satisfaction arising from an assurance that we are instrumental in advancing the interests of his kingdom, and of glorifying him in our bodies and spirits which are his.

The importance of our returning to the Lord is enhanced by the peculiar situation of the church of Christ at the present day. She is fast approaching a *most interesting crisis* in that mighty contest which she has so long maintained with the powers of darkness. If the writer has any correct understanding of the prophetical Scriptures, the time cannot be very far distant when the kingdoms of this world are to become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ. But this glorious triumph of truth and righteousness is most evidently to be preceded by extraordinary exertions on the part of the great adversary of God and man, to maintain his dominion over this fallen world, and prevent, if possible, the fulfilment of the promises made to Zion respecting her enlargement and glory in the latter days. This is plainly intimated by several of the inspired writers; particularly by St. John in the 16th chapter of the Apocalypse. "I saw," says he, "three unclean spirits like frogs go out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For these," he

adds, "are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth, and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." Without attempting an exegesis of this interesting passage, we may venture to say, that it plainly indicates an extended and desperate effort on the part of Satan to muster his forces, and bring on a general engagement between the friends and the enemies of Christ. And are there not, brethren, some clear indications of such a movement in the existing state of the world? Are not the agents and emissaries of the prince of darkness, and of the anti-christian powers of Europe, laboring with unusual industry and zeal, especially in our country, to destroy those civil and religious institutions, on the preservation of which, the prosperity of the Church of Christ so essentially depends? Has not the civil and religious state of our country greatly changed for the worse, within a very few years? And should the progress of moral and political deterioration be equally rapid for a few years to come, what will remain to us of the fair inheritance left us by our fathers? Indeed, there appears much reason to fear that, in less than twenty years, the empire of liberty and of true religion in this western world, will be subverted; and that all the evils naturally resulting from the prevalence of despotic power, and of an impure and bloody superstition,

will here be realized. And does it, brethren, become us, at such a time, to slumber? Oh how important it is that we awake to righteousness, and pray with fervency for the interposition of that almighty arm, which alone can save ourselves, our children, our country, and the church of Christ, from impending evils!

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